

Obstacles to the prevention of teenage smoking

Joseph A. Califano, Jr served as Secretary of Health Education and Welfare in the Carter administration during its first 30 months. Regarded as one of the most innovative leaders ever appointed to the highest health post, he earned the enmity of the tobacco industry because of the smoking and health programs he sought to implement. The tobacco industry went so far as to finance bumper stickers that read "Califano Is Dangerous To My Health." President Carter asked for his resignation on July 18, 1979. Mr. Califano tells the story of his years with presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter in Governing America—An Insider's Report from the White House and the Cabinet (New York, Simon and Schuster). In response to a request from Journal editor Alan Blum, MD, Mr Califano agreed to discuss the subject of smoking and its prevention. The following dialogue occurred on November 20, 1984 in Mr Califano's law office in Washington, DC.

Alan Blum, MD: Did President Carter cut your legs out from under you on the cigarette issue or is that too strong a term?

Joseph A. Califano, Jr: He never directly told me not to go forward with the cigarette program but he clearly regarded it as an enormous political liability. Dr Peter Bourne, who was his health advisor, clearly wanted to temper the program. I think in a funny way President Carter got hoist by his own petard. He wanted a health promotion/disease prevention program. He told me that when we first talked about the job. Every doctor I interviewed for the top medical posts at HEW—over 100—said without exception we had to move on cigarette smoking, the number one killer and the number one cause of disease and disability.

AB: Did you ask the AMA for nominees?

JC: No, but they also agreed on this point. I then decided to move against cigarettes, but I didn't know how. This action, incidentally, had nothing to do with the fact I had quit smoking in 1975. I never even thought of the smoking campaign when I went to HEW. We looked at two things. First 90% of smokers had tried to quit in the past year. They may have gotten up in the morning and said, "I want to quit smoking," but only got as far as their first cup of coffee. Or they may have given it up for a day or a week. Or maybe they actually quit. But the point is they had tried in the previous 12 months. Second, 75% of the adults hooked on cigarettes were addicted before they were 21. This information came from surveys done by the Office on Smoking and Health.

AB: In your book you talk about constantly fighting the label "ex-smoker."

JC: Yes, because it became an issue. Tobacco interests kept charging that I was a zealous ex-smoker.

AB: In 1985, Jimmy Carter is going to make smoking

one of his major priorities in his Carter Center. Did you know that?

JC: No, I did not, but that certainly is fascinating information in view of his administration's record on the tobacco industry. It has been a cold political issue from his point of view.

AB: You are the only senior government official and the only HEW secretary not only to propose anti-smoking campaigns but also to condemn cigarette advertising. What led you to do that?

JC: The problem of cigarette advertising is that it is not directed at 35-year-old men and women who decide to give up at least five years of their lives and greatly increase the danger they will get cancer, heart disease, and emphysema. Cigarette advertising is largely directed at making smoking a glamorous activity for teenagers. That came out in the Federal Trade Commission Report in 1981 spearheaded by Mike Pertschuk, but the tremendous fight of the cigarette companies prevented the FTC from disclosing any of their advertising strategy. Their fight demonstrated just how important their strategies are. Tobacco advertising is a billion and a half dollar a year industry, but I had less than 10 million dollars in the HEW budget to deal with this. Let me tell you this, if you have any doubts about how important advertising is: the tobacco industry didn't care about how much money we devoted for research, but they fought against all the money I tried to get for educating kids about the dangers of smoking.

AB: In 1979 you said that the companies each should give 10% of their advertising budget for a mass media program to discourage teenage smoking. Now Reynolds has placed ads in teen magazines saying "We don't want kids to smoke." They've even collaborated with the National Association of State Boards of Education on a book called *Helping Youth Decide*. They've done what you've asked them—or have they?

JC: I don't think they have. We need a concerted effort that lays out the dangers of smoking for kids. Tobacco companies should not have anything to do with the copy that is written. They should simply provide 10% of the money they spend on advertising and give it to the state public health organizations and the school systems—organizations that will look at this from the health point of view and from the children's welfare.

AB: But while you were secretary, New Jersey was given \$95,000 for a year-long anti-smoking program. That's less than one hour's worth of cigarette advertising.

JC: It was not advertising in the usual sense, but rather educational materials that could be used by a teacher in the classroom. We know those programs work. Schools that have those programs graduate a far lower proportion of teenagers who smoke. That is where the effort ought to go.

AB: Are you excluding contexts other than the class-

had Helms as head of the Senate Agriculture Committee, and they've been able to sabotage any kind of counter-cigarette bill. But, ironically, in the past year the North Carolina Council of Churches and the Southern Baptist Convention—tobacco-state based religious groups—have questioned the very continuation of tobacco-growing, and *The Greensboro News and Record*, and *The Louisville Courier-Journal* have covered the problems caused by the continued cultivation and selling of tobacco. What about New York? Little of this questioning has gone on in New York, which is headquarters for three of the six major cigarette companies. Is New York our leading tobacco center?

JC: I don't think so, but the papers in New York—*The Times*, *The Daily News*—are supportive of efforts against smoking.

AB: But if you were running for the Senate from New York, and you learned that in Albany one of the leading lobbies is Philip Morris, that the Governor has appointed George Weissman (chairman of the board of Philip Morris) as a special advisor and head of a business development campaign for New York State, and that most members of the black and Hispanic caucus voted against the Clean Indoor Act in 1984, the political pressure in favor of tobacco would be profound. The legislative record of New York probably is worse than that of any state, including North Carolina.

JC: That's true and equally unfortunate. I would be interested to see Governor Cuomo trying to take some leadership with the legislature, for example, banning of smoking in public places or requiring that people have a smoke-free work place. Legal action works, and we know it works. It works in California. I just read a story about Minnesota, which has the objective to be a smoke-free state by the year 2000. We must have laws, because then people can sit in offices and indoor public places and not have to breathe that stuff.

AB: Are you willing to take a closer look at *The New York Times*? You were very concerned about the reaction of the *Times* to you, to your policies, and to your beliefs. Yet, what is the *Times* if it will not even address its largest single source of revenue? Is this a newspaper that can be condemned? Can it be taken as an organ that is subverting the health belief system?

JC: Anyone who runs a newspaper is going to tell you first of all right on the editorial page about the need for products that are legal advertising. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* gave plenty of coverage to the issues I raised, as distinguished from *TIME* or *Newsweek*. The second question is the ethics of whether or not newspapers have an obligation not to permit themselves to be used to promote something that is unhealthy. That is a tough question because it gets into a whole host of areas of how and where to draw the line. I spent years representing *The Washington Post*. We faced awfully tough problems in ethical advertising: what we should allow and what we should stop. Ultimately the paper came to the conclusion that it would let advertising run that was found to be honest and socially acceptable. That still may not answer the cigarette question, but my hunch is that most newspaper publishers will say, "I'll run the ad with the health warning that the US Congress says to put on. That's the law of the land and I'm following that." Some people would say that is a cop-out.

Pleasant
 Chicago
Sun-Times
 Final markets
 Closing time at 1:30 p.m.
 to 1:30 p.m. Details on Page 14.
 134 city and suburbs, 234 elsewhere
 Friday, July 20, 1979

Blumenthal to go

Califano is ousted; HEW post to Harris

Civillett reportedly will replace Bell at Justice Dept.; Page 3

AB: There seems to be subversion of the issue when you compare the enormous number of articles on EDB and asbestos with the handful of those on cigarettes or cigarette advertising. Can *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post* be exposed for having failed to address the ethical dilemma?

JC: The way to approach this is to have the readership constantly raise the issue and let the papers ponder their response.

AB: Incidentally, you sound as if you would have worked very well with Surgeon General Koop.

JC: Koop has been first class—gutsy and strong. I wish he would be more vocal. He's got charisma, but he has to keep talking. He has a good image with that great beard and uniform.

AB: Are there any Congressmen who will help carry the day on this issue?

JC: Congressmen are interested in this issue. It has gained a little bit of support every year, but it's very tough. Look at the big vote two years ago on the agriculture subsidy for tobacco farmers which came the same year as the extension of the Civil Rights Act. My recollection is that the entire black caucus and a large number of liberals voted for the tobacco subsidy. They voted for it as a tradeoff because the North Carolina delegation and some other southern delegations agreed to vote for an extension of the Civil Rights Act. That kind of deal will exist in every democratic legislative body in the world, and it certainly exists here. While I don't like that kind of deal, I understand it. What I don't like and don't understand is the tremendous power of Congress. You ask me what I worry about in this country. I'm worried about Congress. I'm worried about a Congressman who earns \$70,000 and has to keep up two houses. The day after he's elected, he has to start raising half a million dollars to pay off campaign debts and another million for the next campaign. I'm worried about the environment where the committees and subcommittees he sits on are more important to the congressman because of the money he can raise, than are the constituents in his district. That is what is happening.